

Alison Mezger:

Hi, friends. Welcome back to The Women's Cast. I'm your host, Alison Mezger. I serve as the Central Women's Ministry Director at The Austin Stone, and I'm so glad you're joining us for this four episode mini-series that we're calling 'The Road to Refuge.' Our theme for this year's Women's Retreat is Refuge, and it's our hope that these conversations will help all of us consider and really practically live in light of the refuge we have in Jesus leading up to and long after Retreat. And don't worry, we've got plenty more to talk about once we're together in March. We aren't giving any of that away today. So when I say refuge, if we're anything alike, you probably think of a bunker within battle or a shelter within a storm. And as accurate and good as I think these images are, they also propose an interesting question for our faith.

When we realize that all throughout scripture, God refers to Himself as a refuge. In Psalm 46:1-3, God says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help and trouble." In Psalm 91:2, we hear, "I will say to the Lord, my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust." We also see this idea of refuge spoken about in other ways throughout scripture. In Psalm 9, God is a stronghold, in Psalm 27, we're hidden in the secret place of His tent. So these ideas of fortress help stronghold, secret place. These are all ways of describing God as our refuge. So why does God describe Himself this way? Well, quite simply because we're in a battle. I know this isn't language that's naturally comfortable to us, but it's very present in scripture to describe our present reality. So this battle, what's it like?

The battle we face is a surprising one, and that's exactly what makes it a powerful one. Our enemy often flies stealthily under the radar of everyday awareness, wreaking havoc on our souls, our relationships, potentially our whole lives. These threats often don't come with the loud explosion of a bomb or the electric whip of a lightning bolt. The threats to our faith, peace, joy, they're often quiet and discreet. John Mark Comer said, "Half of the fight is realizing that you're in a battle in the first place." So that's where we start. We face threats in multiple forms. But for this series, we're going to focus on four that we think are the forerunners of our current day, lies, distraction, hustle, and apathy. All too often, you and I and the women that are going to join me go about our lives unaware of or unengaged with the battle being waged for our hearts and minds. We go around believing and speaking lies often oblivious to the untrue narratives about God, ourselves and others that inform everything we do.

We live distracted lives full of noise that make us anxious, among other things. We try to hustle our way to positions of value by working harder and working without ceasing. And in the background, many of us are silently being crushed under the effects of our sin because we are apathetic towards it. So we're going to spend these next four episodes acknowledging the battle against lies, against distraction, hustle, and apathy. And discussing the how of seeking refuge in Jesus through the specific disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, confession, repentance, and Sabbath. Before we jump into today's topic, I want you to meet the friends and co-laborers I'm joined by today. Purshia, Amanda, welcome back.

Amanda Brown:

Thank you.

Purshia:

Thank you.

Alison Mezger:

Introduce yourselves just in case they don't know who you are. Tell us a little bit about yourself, Amanda.

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Amanda Brown:

I am Amanda Brown. I'm on staff with our St. John congregation team. I serve as our Equipping and Women's Director there. Been around the Stone for a zillion years now, going on 19 this month, I guess. And I have three boys ages 12, 10, Nope, just had a birthday. 11 and 7.

Alison Mezger:

Nice.

Amanda Brown:

And a husband that I enjoy.

Alison Mezger:

Another boy, that's great. Purshia.

Purshia:

Also, this is for free. Amanda is the most fashionable boy mom that I've ever met.

Alison Mezger:

True.

Amanda Brown:

Thank you.

Purshia:

Write that down. My name's Purshia and I am on staff at our south congregation as our Equipping in Women's Director. I've been here for a little over two years.

Alison Mezger:

Woo-hoo.

Purshia:

Half a presidential term.

Alison Mezger:

That's right.

Purshia:

That's great.

Alison Mezger:

You're living the young adult life indeed.

Purshia:

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Indeed.

Alison Mezger:

Is that even...

Purshia:

Yeah, I don't think I'm young adult anymore. I don't think I'm just regular-ish, regular adult.

Amanda Brown:

You're YoPro.

Purshia:

Yeah, but like I'm 29 now, so it's like...

Amanda Brown:

I still say YoPro.

Purshia:

For real?

Amanda Brown:

Yeah.

Purshia:

Okay, I'll take it. YoPro.

Amanda Brown:

There you go.

Purshia:

I am young and professional in the city.

Alison Mezger:

Not in the country.

Purshia:

Not in the country, not in the rural areas.

Alison Mezger:

In the city.

Purshia:

There's street lights where I am.

Amanda Brown:

Oh my gosh.

Alison Mezger:

Fantastic. Guys, I know that you feel it just like I do. We believe some crazy stuff sometimes. Some of it sounds nothing like what's in scripture. Some of it sounds similar, but it's either masquerading as truth or is actually only partially true. And these beliefs, these lies that turn into narratives, they can only be fought by one thing, and it's something we don't have in and of ourselves. We have to fight the lies with truth. But in order to seek refuge from the lies, we have to know where the refuge is. We have to know what it's like, and we have to know what makes it safe. As believers, we trust that because the Bible is God's actual written Word and His revelation of Himself to us, that it is the most trustworthy and safest place, the only place really for our lies to be met with truth.

And so, the way we seek refuge is through consistent Bible reading. At this point in the conversation, there are so many directions that we could go. People write entire books on just one spiritual discipline. I know we can't cover it all, but we want to continue to place emphasis on the how. And I can think of no better way to do that than to just talk with these two trusted friends. Not because any of us have conquered the lies, but because we're just as a need of refuge as you are. So we'll be real about our hows and our whys of Bible reading in our lives. And we hope that sharing our failure and our foibles, as Ross likes to say, as well as our tips and tricks will encourage you. So, you all are ready to jump in?

Amanda Brown:

Love it.

Purshia:

Indeed.

Alison Mezger:

We're all agreed. We are unanimous in this room, that Jesus is the hero and we are not. So that's our starting place.

Amanda Brown:

That's good.

Alison Mezger:

Before we get into the how, I want to know your initial response to the fact that we are swimming in a culture and we have flesh that feeds us lies. Does that resonate? What do you think about that?

Amanda Brown:

Yeah, that resonates.

Alison Mezger:

Resounding, yes.

Purshia:

Yeah. I mean, I think it's very tangible to me that not only are there things that society can placate on us from outside things like social media and things like that, there's also the inside things that I believe based on my upbringing, based on my own particular bits of sin. And so, at any given moment, there's all these little barbs that can truly kind of reaffirm in a bad way these untruths.

Alison Mezger:

Before we started recording, we had a quick conversation about whether we were talking about Bible reading or lies in general. I think we have to talk about both. What's your immediate response to that?

Amanda Brown:

The lying culture that I think is so pervasive right now is this, live your own truth kind of lie. You watch any reality television, you're going to hear it on repeat. You'll see it all over social media. What does that even mean? I think it means something along the lines of if it feels good, then that is right, and that is true. And I think that can certainly be a temptation, I mean, what our flesh wants is if it doesn't feel good, then it must not be right or it doesn't have a place in my life. For me personally, I think the lies that feel the loudest are two that are kind of conflict with one another. One is that I constantly fight the lie of just feeling like I'm too much.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah.

Amanda Brown:

My personality is too much, I have too much. I'm just too much for God. I'm too much for relationships. And then on the other hand, the lie that I can feel from primarily social media is that I'm not enough. So it's like, gosh, if I have to wrestle with those things on a daily basis and sit in that tension all the time, how do I navigate that? Those are the two lies that I feel like are most loud in my personal life.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah, man, I think that resonates with me super strongly. And I think, I can't imagine there's not a woman listening that doesn't feel one of those, or probably both. And I think our culture's really good at giving us not just one. It would be enough to just struggle with one of those lies. But then to have to sort through the dissonance of believing two very contradictory things at the same time that both feel true and both feel personally really destructive and paralyzing. If you're too much and not enough all the same time, what do you do?

And I know at least for me, when I am stuck kind of believing the narratives that create that or that stem from that, I cannot work that out on my own. It is a total cycle, and there is no escape ramp on my own because I will, as soon as I work my way out of feeling that, okay, not enough, then it feeds that I'm too much. And then as soon as I address that, it will feed the other one. So we have to have something outside of ourselves that speaks truth over both of those lies. Because I know for me personally, if I address one, it just feeds the other.

Amanda Brown:

Yeah.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah. Thanks for sharing that, Amanda. I was going to ask, when you think of the lies and false narratives of our day, what comes to mind? Purshia, anything specific for you? Jump out.

Purshia:

I mean, I think of so many prevalent beauty standards on a physical level. And then what I think gets advertised as like a godly woman usually is, no shade to any people listening that are what I'm about to say, but all the baked goods. And I don't know why that's the first thing that came to my mind, it's just like I bake. But these kind of more funneled through Christian subculture than biblical, you know what I'm saying. And I'm not saying I line up with those either, but it feels so prevalently advertised to me. Or what I probably grasp onto in my insecurity is that I'm not what society would say a godly woman looks like or is operates as.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah, that's good. We get into a lot of dangerous territory when we start defining biblical femininity, biblical womanhood as anything other than just Christ-likeness. But the only way to get to that conclusion of what the three us, of what women listening to are actually called to look like and be like, is Jesus. And there are a million reasons why that's not our first conclusion. There are a million things within the church and outside of the church that are telling us we can and should be other things. And that's what faithfulness looks like, that's what obedience looks like. And some of them feel compelling and some of them feel really convincing. And so, unless we have an actual truth to combat that. I feel that with you, there's going to be a million stereotypes, a lot of which represent good things, but may not be the specific call on my life and may not be what obedience or faithfulness looks like for me or for you.

I can't call you, I shouldn't call you to live a life that looks like mine and thinking that discipleship to Jesus looks like us looking more like each other. And far too often, I think I know I will inadvertently try to disciple those around me to look more like me instead of look more like Jesus. And when we do that collectively as a church, we have to set some sort of outside standard for what that looks like. And it's most often going to be culturally defined and rarely actually defined by scripture. So we have to keep coming back to that truth. That's hard to do.

I feel that. So if the lies they feel prevalent, they feel like you don't have to look very far, you don't have to go out seeking them. They're in our own minds, they inform our experiences and our experiences inform them. They're in our phones, our social media, they're in all of the media we consume. If they are so prevalent before we even get into the actual Bible reading. When you think about what does it look like to combat those, let's just talk about what is the quality of a weapon against that have to be? What do we need in order to fight those lies?

Purshia:

Scripture says the sort of the Spirit, which is the Word. And like I said earlier, if there's so many things constantly chastising us in us and around us, and the main defense mechanism that God has given us is a book he wrote for us, and it's seen as daily bread, then we should be eating of it constantly. Because just is constantly probably even more constantly, there are things trying to take that joy away from us, trying to take truth from us or at least taint it.

Alison Mezger:

So you hit on a couple of things and you mentioned the ongoing onslaught of the lies, and it's no surprise then that scripture is described as daily bread. So we know that there's something about our approach to seeking truth that has to be met with the same regularity or frequency as the attack we're under. What other things about the character of the Word of God as that truth can you think of?

Purshia:

I think of Hebrews where I started saying, the homie says, but I don't know who he is. He said that the Word is a double edged sword, cutting through bone and marrow, able to discern through our hearts and able to test our truest motives. And then I think of Psalms where it talks about the Word being sweet, sweeter than honey, much finer honey and gold, and there's a value there. And then I think about 2 Timothy, "All scriptures breathed out by God and profitable for proof, for teaching, for correction, training, and righteousness that the man or woman of God may be ready for every good work." So if it's all sufficient, if it's valuable, if it's beautiful, if it's able to cut through all the crap that this life throws at us, then I need it.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah, that's good. When you rattled off all those verses by memory, guys, just so you'll know, which is fun. It stands out to me that scripture kind of puts itself up not just as this measure of what is true and right and good, but also in our relationship to it, whether it is us needing to be planted by the stream of living water like Psalm 1. It is both a source of comfort to us, which we need when we're believing lies. But then also the idea that it's a sword, it's also a weapon against the lies around us, but also the lies in us. So it's interesting to think about how often I need to be both comforted and truly rebuked by the Word.

Purshia:

Confronted.

Alison Mezger:

I need a hug and a slap on the cheek kind of at the same time. And the Word of God is the only thing rightly positioned to do that.

Amanda Brown:

I think I'm remembering back when my boys were younger and they were really into good guys and bad guys. And we were talking to them about, "Do you know who the worst bad guy is of all?" And they'd go, "Satan." And you know what? He uses and we'd tell them it was lies. And so, if we want to fight the lies, then we have to have the truth. We have to have God's Word. And I remember one of my boys going, "But does God know about lightsabers? Like it seems like it might be more effective than just words."

Purshia:

He's like, someone's got to tell him there's at least more energy efficient.

Amanda Brown:

Yeah.

Purshia:

So funny.

Amanda Brown:

But I think it's so sweet to me to remember that, but I think I relate to. There are other things that feel like they could fight this.

Alison Mezger:

That's right.

Amanda Brown:

And I think on top of the characteristics that you've listed, Purshia, the one that stands out to me is the finality and the authority of scripture that it does get the final Word and it is the most powerful and ultimately destructive of the lies.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah, that's good. What are some of the things that you're tempted to run to instead of the truth of scripture to fight lies?

Amanda Brown:

For me, it's busyness. If I busy myself, then the lies get quieter for a little bit. I don't hear them as much because it feels like I've got control of things or just generally numbing out with comforts of the world. If I'm on my couch, it doesn't feel as loud, it doesn't feel as pervasive. I can silence it for a little bit.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah. Well, it's interesting, both of those. And I think my answers would be the same is we're not actually combating the lies. We're just quieting them a little bit. They're still there, and you'll wake up tomorrow and they'll be there.

Amanda Brown:

That's right.

Alison Mezger:

Or somehow the work will stop or something will change whatever we were using to keep them at arm's length, a little bit more changes, but they just get quieter. They're still there.

Purshia:

I would say comfort, but that materializes itself in food. I'm a pretty emotional eater. And so, to assuage anxiety or fear or anger or boredom or apathy, food is usually the fleshly answer. And honestly, it feels like, well, I got to eat, you know what I'm saying. It could easily be a good and right thing to consume food, but I think the heart motivation that I come to it with when I'm in those types of spaces definitely feels very light saber-ish.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah, that's going to be our analogy reports. We got this sort of the spirit and we've got a bunch of lightsabers and one sounds like it's going to be effective, but it's actually the other one. That's good. Thank you, Brown boys. Okay, so let's move into the practical stuff. We got to talk about what this actually looks like, and I want to be really clear in how we talk about this, that there are aspirational realities for all of us that are the best practices, the things that have worked for us in seasons, that have served this discipline, that have helped. There's also the reality that that's not always reality. And so, we are going to talk about both of those things. So from the beginning, let's just do that in a couple of categories. What does regular Bible reading or even irregular Bible reading look like for you in seasons where that's somehow easier and in seasons, why? For whether it is heart or life circumstance, situations, it's harder. Give me just a picture, Purshia, of what kind of Bible intake, Bible meditation looks like in your life.

Purshia:

Couple disclaimers. I think that this really is, as far as spiritual disciplines go, this is something that over years God has really blessed me in, and I'm grateful for that. And Tim, it's not me, but I try to wake up at around 6:30 to 7 every day, and I spend 10 to 15 minutes of time in prayer, confession, praying for focus, asking the Spirit to guide my time in the Word, and then read whatever assigned reading I have. One of my best friends, we're doing a Bible reading plan through the Bible project and reading that and slowly going through it and asking God, "What is this supposed to change about me? What are you revealing about yourself to me, Lord?" And then about 40 minutes of that, and then 10 to 15 minutes of journaling and reflecting in prayer, that's when it's good. And then, which I would say is 82% of the time that feels right, B-

And then the other, I don't know, math, whatever is left, usually it's me waking up late and hurriedly getting dressed and then in the car while I'm in traffic because traffic is everywhere. I am listening to whatever assigned Bible reading on the ESV app because that's the translation that I use. And in that, I always feel this tinge of, this feels like a JV effort. But I think the spirit has really grown me in the ability to show myself grace and then to know that I have to lay down the expectation of what that time is like, because if I don't, it'll stop me from having it because I'll be like, well, it's not the full hour. It's not the sitting down at my comfortable chair and with my favorite playlist at my favorite coffee shop and all of that because quick hurried time in the Bible that I may view as bad is better than no time in the Bible because I've not met my own self-made standard of it.

Amanda Brown:

Yeah, that's good. Before we started recording, I was joking with Alison that I think I was selected because I am a loser with this. I'm just kidding, I'm not a loser. God loves me. But Bible reading, it has been a struggle for me my entire walk with Jesus. When we talk about it, feeling like it being a discipline, it has never not felt like a discipline to me. It feels like a sacrifice and a real act of obedience. And so, I share that hopefully as an encouragement to be like, I've been walking with Jesus for a long time now, and I hope God changes that in me, but it's just always been really hard. So in seasons where it's been easier, it is...

Now, granted, I have to put this through the filter of since having kids and like Purshia is describing waking up at 6:30 or 7, well, my kids are getting ready for school at 6:30 or 7, so we're talking about back it up a couple hours if I'm going to do anything for myself. And so, that feels really challenging. So right now, I don't have a set time because my days look different with who's taking the kids to school and who's getting them out the door and things like that. But I try to have about 30 minutes before I

start my day. Sometimes that's at home, sometimes that's at the office. Weekends feel really hit or miss with me depending on what we have going on.

I will say right now we're recording this during December and I'm working through our church's advent guide. And that has been so sweet for me because I feel like I don't, in some ways it can feel a little bit like a give up because I feel like I've been a part of this church for so long and we celebrate self-feeding on the Word. And I love that. I'm not saying that that's bad for sure, but sometimes when I'm given something as a package like read this, process this, it can feel a little bit like a give up and it can feel like, why can't I just do this on my own? So that's a lie.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah, that's a lie.

Amanda Brown:

And that's one that I have to fight and just receive an advent guide as a grace in my life.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah, that's right.

Amanda Brown:

And enjoy it. And that's where I am right now. I truly am very much enjoying it. And then there are other seasons that I might pick up a different kind of guide. And then there are different seasons where I'm just self-feeding on the Word, working through a different book of the Bible. So there are seasons where it feels a little bit easier, but most of my walk with Jesus, it has been a discipline.

Alison Mezger:

Thanks for sharing that, Amanda. My story's more similar to yours than Purshia's. There are certain things for all of us that come easy and other things that don't. And I think when I look at where I am in my chronological Bible, I'm like, "Oh, lordy, I hope no one sees the bookmark." And I know that for me that the consistency of the daily reading through a chronological plant that is so good for me and kind of needed that needed accountability. And yet, I've had to take breaks to study other things throughout the year and also, had breaks because of my own flesh and schedule and selfishness and lies and all of that. And I think the benefit of accountability that I've had has been that no one but the publisher of that dated chronological Bible cares where I am in it. And I think for all of us, this is all about ultimately finding refuge in Jesus.

And so, it's about taking what God has given you and much of that being grace and pursuing Him and really more rightly letting Him pursue you through that. And I love that there were threads of that in both of you all's stories of, man, if it's easy to get up and that's something that you're able to do in your life right now, then take advantage of that. And if you're having to squeeze it in kids' nap time or after the kids go to bed, then take advantage of that. The reality is when I think about any relationship in my life, it doesn't always look the same. It doesn't year over year and it doesn't look the same week by week. And so, the lie that I have to fight specifically about Bible reading is that there is a specific way that it has to look in order for it to be faithful.

And I'm so focused on my faithfulness in it or lack thereof that I forget that ultimately it's about His faithfulness in pursuing me and keeping me all these years in spite of my failures in this discipline. Regardless of actual rhythms, I know there are times for all of us where that time in the Word feels

really rich versus other times that it may feel like a labor. There are also times when it feels confusing or maybe you don't feel anything at all. What does it look like to walk in those seasons? What do you do when it's not just about, oh, it's hard or precious to be in the Word, but actually, what I'm reading is confusing or I'm not feeling anything when I read that? What has that looked like? Have you guys experienced that?

Purshia:

Yes. I think there are definitely seasons, especially in certain books of the Old Testament. Praise God, if you read the Bible and you get to 2 Kings and you're like, "Man, this is really teaching me about Jesus." That's not the plan that the Lord has laid before me right now. But there are times when it's just like it's so difficult to find what I'm reading influences my life now and how it could have helped the people, then, the original audience. But the things that have helped me in those seasons would I either don't want to or it's confusing, are the three Ps.

Alison Mezger:

Lay it on us, Purshia.

Purshia:

Prayer, persistence and perspective. Prayer, asking God and the Holy Spirit to help you push past these types of seasons because they happen to everyone. It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when and how often. Persistence, because it takes approximately two months to start and keep any habit. And so, listen, there will be days where you do it literally because it's a habit out of the frequency of it. And so, over time, you may not want to read the Bible, but your day will feel lopsided without it, over the course of doing it regularly. And finally, perspective. And this one is the hardest because it takes the most time. It wasn't until I'd been walking with Jesus for some time, and I say that relatively, so I just say relative to my life that I realized there were things that I would read in that time that would be a deposit that God would bring up years and years later.

There are so many things I read in college that I think about now that the Spirit just held onto for the proper time, for the proper situation, for the proper season. And that type of perspective not only helps me now, but it helps me in a forward facing sense that this may not mean anything to me right now. It really may not, but in the future, someday it will because God's faithful. And again, I want to reiterate that a bad day of reading the Bible is better than no day of reading the Bible. And so, put those coins in, or at least I try to see it as I'm putting coins in the bucket that will serve future Purshia years or decades from now.

Alison Mezger:

So what do you do, real practically? What do you do in that moment? Where like, "Well, I just read my assigned reading from Leviticus and I read the footnote at the bottom that helps me at least know generally..."

Purshia:

What's happening.

Alison Mezger:

... that this has anything to do with Jesus and Him fulfilling the law. But other than that, my soul doesn't feel stirred in this moment. I'm looking for, I'm hopeful for a reaction, whether that is a thought or a feeling that I'm not getting right now. You have that experience. What do you do, Purshia?

Purshia:

I confess to God that I know that Your Word is every single syllable is valuable. But there's a gap between my mind and my heart that is unable to see that. And so, God, would you help me to find something in this? And if You don't, lead me to just entrust that this time was devoted to knowing you and being known by You and help me to do it again tomorrow. Because sometimes, and I'm sorry if either of you all say something that's better, but-

Alison Mezger:

I was going to get theoretical.

Purshia:

You got to say something that's theoretical, but sometimes that really is all that there is. It's just the joy of knowing that I took time to commune with God. And sometimes the feeling isn't there, but when we do practice that way, Matt Chandler said that it's putting kindling around a fire that looks like it's about to go out. All you see is some embers and maybe some smoke. And every time you pray or you read the Bible or you seek to memorize a passage or you do anything, you're putting little twigs and leaves around that fire, not because you can light it, but because you have forward facing faith that the Spirit will reignite it because He always does. So have the mindset of Leviticus 12 may not have spoken to me today, but I just put another leaf on the log or I'm going to be camping like that. So I don't know how fires get started.

Alison Mezger:

That works.

Purshia:

But all the settings, all the little ingredients of a fire adding to that.

Alison Mezger:

That's good. Well, and how sweet to get to acknowledge Your ways and thoughts are higher than mine. And so, today, I don't get it. And today it's not about feeding the feeling. But like you're saying, I'm trusting that I'm making a deposit in relationship for something in the future.

Amanda Brown:

For me, it's leaning on the promises that I know in scripture that his Word is doing something. Even when my mind, my heart can't catch up to it, that His Word is alive and active. It's not going to return void. That meditating on His law day and night, that I will be a tree planted by streams of water. I want those things. And even when it doesn't feel like it, I can trust that His Word is true and that it's doing something.

Alison Mezger:

And I imagine just knowing your personality, and we're similar in this way, that we're so often thinking about what we are doing with the thing, even with the Word that to step back and actually trust that it's what's doing the work. It's working on me regardless of whether or not I know what to do with this passage, and He actually has to remind me of that. What are some of your favorite things right now? What makes Bible reading easy or enjoyable? Kind of the tips and tricks. What are the things that if you're sitting down with a new believer or me, because I'm just in a dry season, you're going to be like, "Hey, let's do this together. Or you should think about spending time in the Word this way." What does that look like?

Purshia:

I have a couple things. One, the Bible project, just as a one as a resource, these two dudes up in Portland, if you aren't privy to them, they make these incredible animated videos that give really good big picture flyovers of the Bible and then Word studies prevalent throughout scripture and it's a really practical tool. Also, something that has served me well is putting myself around to the best of my abilities and whoever is around in my community of faith at that very season, older saints who have read the Bible more than me. And just to listen, to say, "Hey, can I get you lunch at some point? And just listen to how scripture has changed your life." Shout out to Denise Stevens because every time we get coffee at Summer Moon out West, it's a far away from where I live, but it is worth it because I'm getting to get just some secondhand goodness of what it looks like to faithfully long obedience in the same direction type vibe.

Also, a prayer closet. Listen, shout out to everybody who watched that movie War Room and tried to make it happen with Priscilla Shirer. But there's a little spot in my apartment that I've kind of fixed up, and it's not the holy of holies. I know it's just a closet, but there's something about setting up time with God in that little space that really does. There are times when I just really want to linger there because I know that this is where I have the most ability to just be completely honest with God and unadulterated and just fully be known and loved by Him in that little space. And so, for some, that could be a closet, for others, that could be your car. For some, that could be your dinner table, but have some sort of spot that when you come to, the Spirit does a work of just preparing you, for lack of better term, to be with Him.

Alison Mezger:

You know what my spot is like?

Purshia:

What is it?

Alison Mezger:

So I've had to take a little bit of the opposite approach, but the same intent in that which is a little bit of the reality of my day looks so different day to day that even if I plan out a week ahead of time, I know that the spots and the times are going to need to be varied. So I've gotten to the point where instead of having the favorite Bible and journal, I have multiple, and I keep them in those places. So if it ends, there's a Bible that just lives in my car and it's one I like. I keep a Bible there because if I find myself lingering in the carpool line, that may be my best shot for the day. But also I have my other kind of favorite one on my bedside table.

But I've had to move beyond having the one prayer closet, which I love for certain seasons because I'm fighting for that anywhere. And I think the preparation to just decide that that's okay and that that's going to make seeking Him possible took a lot of the pressure off of me. Or the feelings of failure when I finally found that time and it didn't have the things that I needed. So I've had to go the shotgun approach of Bibles and journals everywhere. And then, of course, we've always got the digital things, but for me, it's still really helpful to go analog when I'm trying to get with him because the distractions are just too much.

Purshia:

Like notifications and things.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah.

Amanda Brown:

The only other resource that I really enjoy, well, one that I want that I do not have is the ESV study Bible. I really want one of those, because I've seen some of you guys with those. So that's next on my list. When I read a scripture back to a couple minutes ago, that doesn't make sense, that my heart can't connect to it. I just love taking a walk with a sermon on what I've just read. So usually, I can find those with the Stone, with the Village Church, with Desiring God. There's usually one, I have rarely come across a scripture that I can't find a corresponding sermon from a trusted church.

Alison Mezger:

That's really helpful.

Amanda Brown:

And so, that I have enjoyed doing that. It usually helps my heart connect with what I've heard.

Alison Mezger:

One of the things I've loved hearing from you guys is there is this combination of self-feeding and then also the second hand. And Amanda, you touched on this, we have such a value in our church for being people and within women's ministry, being women who are self-feeders. We want to learn in our Bible study environments how to study the Bible on our own. And that is a value and so important. And yet, also, what a grace that there are books and sermons and podcasts and other just trusted people in our lives, in our community and our church, that we actually get to have our faith encouraged, have our burden shared because we are able to share in and lean on them-

Purshia:

True.

Alison Mezger:

... what they are learning from scripture. So I know for me, it can be just like you, I think real easy to think I have to do this on my own. And if I remind myself that this really is about how do I grasp on to true things? How do I find a relationship in Jesus? Then I'm going to do that any means possible. I want to know how to seek that on my own. I want to be able to sit with Him, just me and the Word. But I also

want to take advantage of saints that have gone before us and the saints that are walking alongside me and listen to them. And so, I would encourage women out there listening to think about what does it look like in your life to pursue Jesus through Bible reading independently. But also, what does it look like to do that in community with the wonderful resources that our church has and that are available essentially now online. I mean, you can get to anything that you're talking about and that's such a gift.

And also, this is kind of a soapbox of mind. It helps us read wide and deep. That's the idea that you can spend a little bit of time every day reading through long books of the Bible, but not really spending a lot of time going deep in any one of those, that would be reading wide. Reading deep would be spending a concerted amount of time in one place and really going deep. It's that Word steady or biblical theology where we're really digging into one thing and both of those are needed and they can and should look different for us. But I oftentimes think about how in this next season of my life am I going to incorporate both of those. And I'm not ever going to be able to do them both on my own will, I have to do that in community.

Purshia:

And by the influence of the Spirit.

Alison Mezger:

That's right.

Purshia:

Because there's nothing that we can, I think of John 15 like, "Abide me and I in you, for apart from me, you can't do, nothing." Even our best efforts, if not supplemented and led by and filled with and kept by the Spirit, they're just efforts.

Alison Mezger:

That's right.

Purshia:

You talked about wide and deep. But listen to this, honey, listen, when we hear the Word preached to us on a Sunday, and then when we read the Bible daily, devotionally for the 10 minutes or an hour or however long you do that, both those things are great and we should do them, but I will be on this soapbox as long as the Lord lets me be on it. And that is to meditate and seek to memorize scripture because Donald Whitney in his book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, in the chapters that talk about Bible intake. When he talks about meditation on the Word and memorization of the Word, doing those other two things are great, but it's taking the tea of God's Word in the warm water of your life and then taking it out after a few seconds.

But when we seek to meditate on and memorize the scriptures and not perfectly but faithfully, that gives us the ability to put that into the water of our lives and allow it to saturate all of who we are, having its full effect. And I'm like, man, I'm trying to be Lipton for the Lord. You know what I'm saying?

Alison Mezger:

Oh my gosh.

Purshia:

And so, I'm not saying that because I do it perfectly. I'm not saying it because I think it's just the end all be up. But I mean, if that's something that's guaranteed, you know what I'm saying?

Alison Mezger:

Yeah. Let it steep, man.

Purshia:

Let it steep, sister.

Alison Mezger:

Okay, last question or two. We can't do this on our own. We can't hold ourselves accountable. We can't have joy in it. We can't know all the things. What does this look like in community? What have been the things that community has come alongside you in and helped, and why has that been helpful. And how do you seek to do that in your communities?

Amanda Brown:

Man, I think accountability, LTG style for me has been absolutely crucial. I think for people that have been walking with Jesus as long as I have, or even on staff, that it's easy to assume that you're spending time in the Word because, of course, you are. This is your job. And I don't know how many times I needed to say I am struggling to study my Bible for somebody to take me seriously in that and to do that in the safety of an LTG and accountability has been really good to have people actually take me seriously and hold me accountable. And there have been seasons where it's been as frequent as a daily or every other day text of how are we doing? Are we in our Bible? And then there are other seasons where it's not quite as necessary for that kind of frequency, but that has been a necessity in my life to stay disciplined.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah. That's awesome. Purshia, what about you?

Purshia:

Same thing with LTG, my good friend that I'm doing that Bible reading plan with. Every day after we read, we send literally a signature emoji to show that we've read for the day or a, "Hey, this is what really encouraged me from what we..." And I think that does two things for me. One, accountability of like, "Hey, I didn't send my emoji today? Does that mean I read?" Probably not. And then the other one is, I can't really put my finger on it, but there's something that the Spirit uses when you're going through the same book with people that you're also doing life with. And even though we aren't reading at the same time in the same place, but we are united in our pursuit of God in the same book at the same time. And that's just like, it's something that God has really used to both deepen my relationship with that person, shout out to Amy, and then to also keep me in the habit of doing it.

Alison Mezger:

Yeah, I love that. I think for me, one of the things that's been really helpful in terms of very practically what that looks like in community is being asked, "What are you sitting with Jesus in right now?" As opposed to, "What are you learning?" And that's a nuanced question, but I think for me, Bible reading

can often become very intellectual or just mental or a check the box kind of thing. And so, being asked a question on a regular basis that really gets to the heart of, what are you sitting with Jesus in?

Amanda Brown:

That's good?

Alison Mezger:

How are you relating to Him in things? And that opens the door for me to be honest about both what I'm learning, what He's teaching me, what cool thing God revealed, but also what's hard where I feel stuck in those things. What I don't understand, it just reminds me that it ultimately is about relationship. And I think it's taken years for me to even know that that kind of question would be more helpful for me than just, "Did you read today? What are you learning?" Which was the default kind of LTG question for years, and that's great. But I think the idea that we could be in community with one another and be so honest about what grace God has given us in this area, but then also what the struggles are so that we know how very specifically to hold each other accountable and not assume that it's just as simple as, what did you read today? Did you read today? Did you read today?

So just an encouragement to have these types of conversations with women in your lives, because there may be a specific way we can hold each other accountable. We could keep talking about this for hours, but we know you have other things to do, and honestly, it's really hot in this little room. We will share in our show notes some resources that we really love, a great study Bible, a book by Jen Wilkin that I would recommend any gal looking to start studying the Word on our own for the first time, called 'Women in the Word,' as well as a couple other things. We'll share those with you. My hope and I know the hope of Purshian Amanda and the rest of our team is that having an honest conversation about the good, the bad, and the ugly, but the realities of Bible reading will encourage you, yes, to pursue faithfulness, but also just recognize the faithfulness of Jesus in your life, and that there is so much more of Him to be found.

And there's so much power to fight the lies that we so easily believe when we go to the Word first, when we make that a part of our lives, when we make that a part of our communal life together, that really is a way that we seek refuge in Jesus. We're going to continue to have this conversation over the next couple episodes where we talk about apathy, we talk about distraction, and we talk about hustle. But ultimately, all of this is about redirecting our gaze to the refuge that we have in Jesus. We're so glad that you joined us. We hope to see you at Retreat, March 3rd through 5th. We love you guys. Stay tuned for what's next. Purshia, Amanda, thank you guys.

Purshia:

Yes.